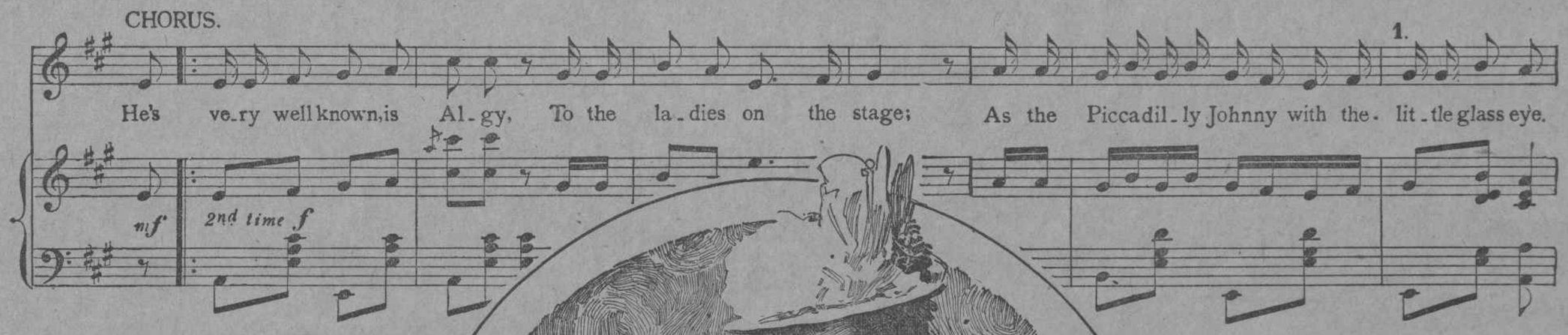
A REGULAR "JOHNNY" —By Alan Dale.— STRAIGHT FROM LONDON.

Chorus of "The Piccadilly Johnny with the Little Glass Eye," Sung by Vesta Tilley with Great Success in England.

Miss Vesta Tilley, Who Sets the Fashion for Piccadilly Swells



And Satirizes Lords and Dukes in Her Clever Songs.

Vesta Tilley as She Really Is.

A FASHION-PLATE for the Johnnies has been rushed through the Custom House. The Anglo-maniacs who turn up their trousers on Broadway, and strut peacockian-ly in the fond belief that they are spicily and congruously English will wish to see Miss Vesta Tilley when she appears at Weber & Fields's music hall. Miss Tilley is the London Johnny in its brightest and most attractive form (and if I say "its," instead of "his," you will, I am sure, forgive me). The London Johnny has been shown in New York by mere men, such as George Grossmith, Jr., and Laurence D'Orsay, but it takes a woman to shed new light on this frothy yet exuberant subect, and Miss Tilley is a student and an artist.

Last Summer, when I was at the Tivoli, I was much astonished to hear two youths with cuffs round their necks, and whalebones in their coats, earnestly discussing a certain Algy.

Said one: "My tailor positively won't make my new suit until he's seen Algy. He's to be here to-night, and I thought I'd come, too."

"Yes," remarked the other; "and they tell me that Algy's got a new necktie made of Paisley shawl, that is going to be all the rage."

This perplexed me, but I was soon enlightened. I saw a cunning little woman emerge from the wings, and heard her sing a melancholy, pathetic ditty, called, "The Piccadilly Johnny with the Little Glass Eye," and I was introduced to Miss Tilley's vogue. It is a vogue founded—by way of a change—upon scenic art. Don't imagine for an instant that the lady is "a male impersonator" in the vulgar acceptation of the term. Don't put her down on your mind's tablets as a loud-voiced creature, who has poured her embonpoint into a pair of trousers, in order to cater to rude and uneducated music hall patrons. If you do you will be sorry enough to write letters of apology to yourself after you have seen her. Vesta Tilley is the cleanest cut artist that this city has seen for a long time, and she is worth the attention not only of the New York Algy, but of his sisters, his cousins, his aunts and all his feminine belongings. The London Johnnies drop into the Tivoli or the Oxford at the Algy hour. I assure you that he is quite an institution, because a woman's wit is brought to bear upon his diaphanous entity. And in the English provinces—where they like to get whiffs of London—Miss Tilley is a god. She doesn't sing by the turn. She sings by the hour, and she talks on the saucy "barmaid" subjects and discusses the "Crl.," and starts the provincials upon a season of the elitest London slang. Miss Tilley will be the joy of the New York tailors. Her appearance will plunge the Johnnies into desperate extravagance. Good clothes cost a fortune, and Vesta Tilley's rigs are just as expensive as those of the artists who patronize skirts and go to Paris to buy 'em.

When I saw "Algy" she was at the Imperial Hotel, resting in utter femininity with a husband. In fact, she was "toying" with chicken sandwiches and hot chocolate, and I heard her say, in dulcet, matinee-girl tones, as I entered, "Oh, Walter, dear, you must try one of these sandwiches. They are delicious. And this chocolate is a dream. I feel quite comforted."

The un-Algy-like sentiment conveyed in these remarks was not more extraordinary than the pertly coquettish demeanor of Miss Tilley, whom I had never seen before outside of a frock coat and unmentionables. Walter, dear—otherwise Mr. De Frece—is a very attentive and affable gentleman, exceedingly proud of his talented little wife. For she "wears the trousers" in public only. In private, you could imagine her "tatting," pouring out afternoon tea, and discussing the latest thing in chiffon. Mr. and Mrs. De Frece have separate trunks. They never quarrel about waistcoats and suspenders. In fact, I firmly believe that Miss Tilley despises her husband's outfit. It is not Algy enough to please her. And as one Algy in a menage is undoubtedly enough, Mr. De Frece is happy in the belief that he is neat, and natty, and that nobody will ever accuse him of wearing Miss Tilley's cast-off garments. The artist's valet is a maid, who knows how to insert a collar button and tighten on a waistcoat. She is also inclined to cast contemptuous eyes upon the unstudied attire of her master.

Miss Tilley is delightfully blithe and sprightly to talk with. There is not an air or a frill in her make-up. She is the meekest sort of a little lady who disappears from view after the curtain falls, and is not in the least anxious to be "interviewed." She has never lost a diamond in her life. Her mommer is used entirely for domestic consumption. She never writes books about her past, because she hasn't one, and the Prince of Wales is to her rather a shabby imitator, because there is a rumor that all his vaunted sartorial originality is acquired from Miss Tilley's own garments, and imitators are always odious, even where they are princely.

"Please don't let it go forth that I copy the Johnnies," said Miss Tilley, pathetically, as she peeped into the chocolate pot to see if there was any more comfort in it. "I don't, I assure you. They copy me. And it is quite natural that they should. I spend my life with the tailor, and I am the joy of his heart. If I have had any success"—this in deferential modesty—"I attribute it largely to the fact that I dress most carefully and most particularly, and that I am, therefore, unlike the usual run of women who wear men's clothes. It is much more difficult and much more troublesome than wearing skirts. There are a thousand dressmakers. There are scarcely half a dozen good tailors. Yes, dress means a good deal to me. I cater to the Johnny most assiduously, and he repays me by copying my attire. And perhaps you think that my tailor isn't aware of that fact."

Miss Tilley laughed a little dulcet cascade. "I have an evening dress suit, brand new, for New York," she went on, "that I wouldn't miss wearing for a very round sum, and a gray frock coat that is a marvel. When I put it on for the first time my tailor burst into tears. I asked him why he wept so copiously. 'I am so proud of you,' he said. 'They are merely tears of joy,' and he went on sobbing."

I was immensely interested in this, for my experience has taught me that the only thing that moves a tailor to emotion is an unreceipted bill. However, there are undoubtedly tailors who revel in their art, although I don't believe that there are any of them in New York.

"Masculine dress is a hard thing for a woman to tackle," said Miss Tilley. "I sing six or seven songs in an evening, and I change my clothes for each song. By changing my clothes, I mean that I change everything, from skirts to boots. A well-dressed Johnny has his boots to harmonize with his clothes. He would no more think of wearing the same shoes with evening dress that he sports in afternoon attire than a woman would dream of using opera gloves to shop in. My wig, too, is a thing that would surprise most actors and actresses. You wouldn't give five shillings for it. It has very little hair on it, but it fits. I don't like to see gentlemen with the bulging heads that they usually wear when ladies attempt to impersonate them."

Miss Tilley has luxuriant tresses of her own, dressed in the prevailing fashion. She has never sacrificed them to the emergencies of her art. The wig maker breaches over the difficulty and saves Miss Tilley from the iniquity of the short crop.

"Who sets the fashions in London?" I asked catechismally, for the subject is a vexed one.

Miss Tilley seemed to be rather put out. "Oh, I don't know," she said, pouting. "There is a rumor that the Prince of Wales does it. That's what people say. Perhaps I had better do the same thing. Consider that I have given the honor to the Prince of Wales."

It was an honor grudgingly given, and anybody who has seen the Prince of Wales lately knows that there is little truth in it, for the Prince is fat and old and obliged to dress in accordance with these disagreeable conditions. But Miss Tilley is loyal. The Prince of Wales has the sartorial name, and Miss Tilley wouldn't criticise that fact.

"I am reckoning on 'The Piccadilly Johnnie with the Little Glass Eye' making a hit for me here," she resumed. "It is the most successful song I have ever had. I hear that somebody has tried it here, but as it was written for me by a very clever person called Norris, I shall venture to give it my interpretation. If New York doesn't care for it I shall not be in the least perplexed. I have forty-seven songs, only fifteen of which are known in America. Just before I left England I tried a new ditty entitled 'The Ooffess Duke,' which is, I think, rather apropos. No, it is not meant as a dig at anybody—positively it isn't. It is a sort of satire on the usual duke who is looking around for somebody rich to marry. Then I have 'The Militiaman,' which I am afraid they may not understand here. I am going to try it, though. And, lastly, I must mention 'The Eton Boy,' with the refrain, "I've been showing my Aunt Matilda round the town.' We buy songs by the barrel—hundreds of them. Of course you know that it is not easy to get catchy songs. This young man Norris, however, I am particularly pleased with. He is the author of 'The Ooffess Duke,' as well as of 'Algy!'."

Miss Tilley finished her last chicken sandwich and leaned back in her chair with a sigh of relief. "I was amused at the custom house," she said, "when a huge individual held up my perfect frock coat and my nattiest trousers, and seemed to insinuate that I was going to open a tailor's shop in America. 'Why, my dearest fellow,' I said to him, 'you really must see that these are tools of trade. Nobody can wear them but me. If you think that you could get into them, we'll adjourn while you try them on.' He seemed alarmed at the discovery that I was comparatively skirtless, but I explained to him that I couldn't sing and dance in skirts, and I believe that he was satisfied."

"Do you keep to one tailor all the time?"

Miss Tilley laughed at my ignorance. "Never," she said. "A man, as well as a woman, must keep himself up to date, or his reputation is gone. When I find that my tailor loses his enthusiasm, and that the Johnnies wear saddened faces, I hie me to the next artist. Novelty is the rage of the hour, and I will not allow masculine fashions to stand still. Why, the Paisley tie I wear is the result of extreme study. It is the very newest thing on the market. A year ago the Johnnies would have laughed in derision at the idea of utilizing their grandmothers' ancient cast-off shawls for neckwear. Now they take to it very kindly, and if New Yorkers do the same I shall be pleased."

By all of which it will be seen that Miss Tilley is here with a mission—and one that will be of absolutely no use to the milliners. I advise Herbert Kelcey to drop in to Weber & Fields's and see her. She may give him a wrinkle or two for his "Coat of Many Colors"—not that this particular coat needs wrinkles, for it is a baggy affair. In fact, I recommend our metropolitan managers to insist upon their leading men and comedy juveniles studying Vesta Tilley. Perhaps Messrs. Weber and Fields may be induced to give a "professional matinee" for the benefit of those young actors who are victimized by their clothes. How to wear evening dress easily is a matter that very few actors understand. Miss Tilley will teach them this, and several other things. She is the one woman who knows how to wear male garb better than the man himself.

ALAN DALE.

VESTA TILLEY IN MASCULINE GARB, AS SHE APPEARS IN HER MOST FAMOUS IMPERSONATIONS.